



ON  
**Colouring**  
as distinct from Tone-inflection

*A lecture by*  
**TOBIAS MATTHAY**



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## PREAMBLE

In an Additional Note to "MUSICAL INTERPRETATION"\*, I alluded to the distinction between Tone-inflection and Colouring; but I have been asked to give further details on this point, hence the present Lecture.

T. M.

\* *Musical Interpretation, its Laws and Principles and their Application in Teaching and Performing.* (Joseph Williams, 1913.)

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W. H. DAWSON

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## COLOURING v. INFLECTION

A lecture by  
TOBIAS MATTHAY

FIRST let me remind you of one or two facts, the understanding of which is a necessary preliminary to the question of COLOURING. *Music* consists of two Elements: the Shape Element and the Emotion Element.

The Emotional in Music cannot be explained nor talked about; we either feel it or we don't—although we can enhance our perceptions in this respect. The Shape Element, however, can be reasoned about, and it has Laws that can be observed and obeyed.

Shape in music implies Rhythm—and Rhythm implies Accentuation. Now I have shown, in *Musical Interpretation*\* and elsewhere that musical Rhythm always implies Movement, Progression, or Growth, in its *Four Main Aspects*: (1) the movement of the key itself in making each sound—a down-movement of the key to that precise place in its descent where sound begins; (2) the Group of quick notes moving towards the next Pulse or Beat; (3) the Phrase, moving towards its rhythmical climax near the end of it; and, finally, (4) the Growth of these phrases into a Whole.

(Illustrations of all these four points were then given.)

But we can only express Emotion and Shape (or Rhythm) through INFLECTION; and there are only *Three Forms* of Inflection possible in playing. These are:

- (1) Tone-variety and *Colouring*;
- (2) Duration-variety, and
- (3) Time-variety and Rubato.

Of these, Rubato is really the most far-reaching of all. It is the one thing, alone, that can be fully transmitted by

\* *Musical Interpretation*. (Joseph Williams.)

the microphone, whether applied rightly—as it sometimes is—or wrongly, as it so often is! Indeed, we use Rubato all day in our ordinary speech.

Let me first show you what is implied by the presence or absence of Inflection; and how a succession of notes remains musically meaningless unless one or more of these forms of Expression are properly applied. I will give you two short examples which you all know:

(The lecturer here played the first two pages of Chopin's Ballade in A flat, and a child's piece, Schumann's 'The Merry Peasant'.)

So you see, even a child must never be allowed merely to *strum*—he must at once be shown to use sounds as a means of Self-expression. Even a dog, although he has but one word available, uses that for Self-expression! What a world of feeling he can manage to communicate through its *Inflections*—Fear, Anger, Rage, Joy and Affection!

(The lecturer here imitated the inflections of a dog's bark.)

If a mere dog can do all this with one word only, how much easier for a child to learn to use musical sounds for such purpose!

The application of all these three forms of Inflection come under inflexible laws and rules which we must learn to obey if we would be artists.

We may perhaps learn this by Intuition (through fineness of ear and perception), but will learn it more quickly and surely by deliberate use of our *Reason*, led by present-day knowledge of the physical, physiological and musical facts, and then transferring the knowledge thus gained to our **SUBCONSCIOUSNESS**.\*

We have to teach our Subconsciousness to act and choose rightly; and the first step towards such successful power of judgement is to understand the *Laws* governing Choice, and

\* As to these contrasts of Tone, Duration and Time, and the laws determining their appropriate application, it is clear that unless the performer has all this literally at 'his fingers' ends' he cannot hope to grapple even with the *beginnings* of the problem of Interpretation. Moreover, no real Self-expression (nor imitated expression) can become possible until all such *technical* facility, both instrumental and musical, has become *Subconscious*—and some of it actually automatic. Here we have one of the most difficult problems for the teacher (and self-learner) to face, not only in Music, but in all other forms of Education.

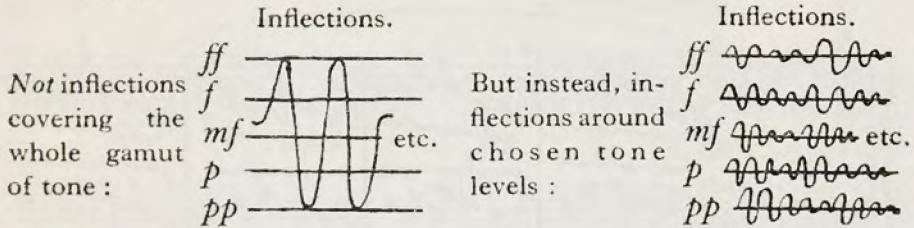
also those governing our treatment of the instrument, and of our own muscles.\*

Coming now at last to the term COLOURING, we find this term is often used quite vaguely, like most musical terms. Some include in it *all* forms of expression, whatever their nature; whilst others restrict the term (as it should be) solely to that particular device which, in Piano playing, is analogous to Orchestral Colouring.

It is this last aspect we are here going to consider, Colouring, that is, as an approximation towards orchestral instrumentation in Pianoforte playing. Here, then, besides those *Inflections* of tone from note to note which constantly occur and are implied in every true performance, we must for this broader kind of contrast keep *whole phrases* or *sections* of the music *at about the same chosen levels of tone*, or tone-quality.

Colouring therefore mainly means that, instead of using inflections the whole way up and down, we must keep *round certain levels* of tone, high up *or* low down *or* midway; and we must keep our inflections around these *contrasting tone-levels*. In thus laying out the various portions of a piece at various *planes* of tone, we here, in a measure, simulate those far greater contrasts of tone-quality which the orchestral palette offers us. Thus:

FIG. I



*Not inflections covering the whole gamut of Tone. But, instead, WITH inflections around chosen tone-levels.*

Let me illustrate this point, choosing the little Intermezzo in A, Op. 117, of Brahms. I will first play a page of it—with a certain degree of tone-*inflection*, but keeping it all to one *mf plane*; and I will then repeat it, laying out the various portions at quite *different tone-levels*;† and you will at once

\* See *Musical Interpretation, its Laws, etc.* (Joseph Williams), and its Supplement, *The Slur and Couplet of Notes*, and *Musical Concentration*, and also *The Visible and Invisible in Piano Playing*. (The Oxford University Press.)

† The use of different layers of *tone-quality* also assists us here.

see what is meant by 'colouring' in this Piano-Orchestral sense, as distinct from mere Inflection.



- (a) Played at *mf* level but with wide up and down inflections, and then
- (b) Played orchestrally—at different tone-levels.

Successful *Part-playing* also depends upon this device—of laying out the various parts at different tone or quality levels. Obviously, all contrapuntal music needs this, but so does more modern music where part-playing is required. As a simple illustration, let us take HENSELT's little *Wiegenliedchen* in G flat. It serves as a good example since it is throughout laid out in four layers of tone—the tune, the bass, and the two middle parts must all through be kept at their own distinctive tone-levels compared to each other. Thus:

(The lecturer here played this piece.)



This form of colouring—or Pianoforte scoring (as it might be called), however, should not be left to the performer, as it so often is, even by some of the great Masters. It is indeed the *composer's* province to consider this kind of colouring, when he is laying out his work for the chosen instrument; yet it is clear that *some* composers have not in the least realized this part of their technical duties, while others have succeeded in so doing. Yet it is one of the main distinctions between effective and ineffective writing for the instrument.

BEETHOVEN, although some there are to-day who may affect to sneer at what they suppose to be his 'bad Piano writing', Beethoven had a far clearer conception of *this* requirement than most of the older great masters and even many modern writers.

He realized the value of *Pitch-contrasts* far more than many a *later* Master has done! Indeed, you can hardly turn up a page of *Beethoven* without realizing the force of this side of his technique. Take, for example, the opening of his Sonata, *Op. 90*, in E minor, where we have such scoring (or instrumentation) applied in minute details of changes of pitch. Schumann, for one, on the contrary, seems to have had no inkling of such possibilities. *He* would probably have written these first lines of *Op. 90* *all* of one pitch—*in the middle of the instrument!*

Compare these two versions:

Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus  
mit Empfindung und Ausdruck

Beethoven

The image shows three staves of musical notation for a piano. The first staff is in common time (indicated by '3/4') and E major (indicated by a single sharp). The second staff is in common time and E major. The third staff is in common time and E major. The notation includes various dynamics (p, pp, f, sforzando), articulations (ritardando, tempo), and performance instructions (diminuendo). The first staff is a single-pitched version, while the second and third staves show Beethoven's original conception with pitch contrasts.

Musical score page 1. The score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp. The music includes dynamic markings: *sp*, *rit.*, *pp*, and *tempo*. The bass staff has a sustained note with a fermata.

Musical score page 2. The score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp. The music includes dynamic markings: *f* and *sf*. The bass staff has a sustained note with a fermata.

Musical score page 3. The score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp. The music includes dynamic markings: *p* and *sf*. The bass staff has a sustained note with a fermata.

Musical score page 4. The score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp. The music includes dynamic marking *p*. The bass staff has a sustained note with a fermata. The text "etc." is written at the end of the page.

à la Schumann

Musical score page 5. The score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp. The music includes dynamic markings: *f*, *p*, *f*, and *p*.



1

5

humann

p

accel. cresc.

rit.

5

etc.

fp

p

p

ff

etc.

As another instance, of somewhat larger patches of this kind of scoring, take the second subject of Beethoven's 'Waldstein' Sonata, and imagine how Schumann might have presented that—all of one pitch, and the repetition given verbatim, thus:

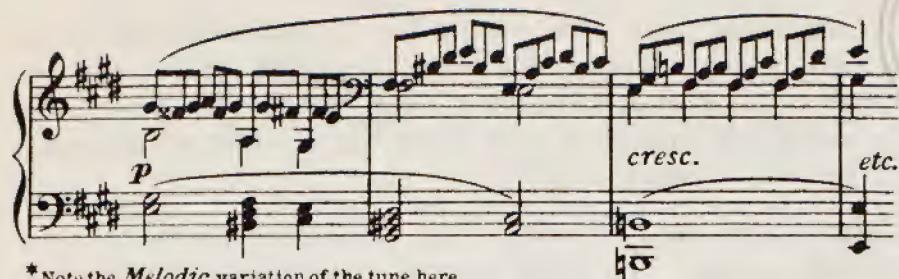
Allegro con brio

Beethoven  
*cantando*

The musical score consists of four staves of piano music. The top staff is in common time, G major, with a dynamic of *dolce*. The second staff is in common time, G major, with a dynamic of *cresc.* The third staff is in common time, G major, with a dynamic of *dolce*. The fourth staff is in common time, G major, with a dynamic of *cresc.*. The notation is heavily edited to show only one pitch (A4) for the entire piece, with various dynamics and markings like *dolce*, *cresc.*, and *sforzando* applied to different sections. The original piano parts are visible on the right side of the page.

of this  
hoven's  
might  
petition

Beethoven  
ntando



\* Note the *Melodic* variation of the tune here

à la Schumann



These eight bars to be  
repeated without variation



Do not think I am here poking fun at Schumann. I have been an ardent Schumannite from my earliest days; and he appeals to me now as strongly as ever; but there is no reason why we should not *learn* even from the evident weaknesses of a beloved Master's technique.

CHOPIN also used the device of pitch-contrast to a considerable extent. His peculiarly effective Pianoforte idiom, however, does *not* so much depend upon the use of *this* particular device (of pitch contrast), nor upon any of the many other contrast-resources of the instrument; but his effectiveness is rather the result of his supreme *musical delicacy of ear*, which always makes him choose (for the Pianoforte) the most appropriate expression of his thought. Chopin's music, in short, is '*effective*' just because of his marvellous *sense of beauty*, and because of his delicate perception not only of the *needs of the instrument*, but also of the possibilities of the human finger using it—qualities that have not been equalled by any other Piano composer. And besides all this, his thought and feeling is always fragrant, delicate, and never coarse.

Notice, as a mere matter of composing-technique, how carefully he avoids calling attention to the *worst shortcoming* of the Pianoforte—its innate *percussiveness*. This percussiveness is indeed a precious asset *rhythmically*—no other instrument is so effective in this respect; yet this is a grave fault *melodically*, especially when we find it so often aggravated by the harmonies being stated in solid vertical masses—vertical blocks, or blobs, like those of a hymn-tune, or harmony-book exercise of the old days. Notice how Chopin's constant *mobility of language* (the horizontal instead of vertical laying out of his harmonies) almost persuades you and deceives you *into imagining* that the Piano is a *sustaining* instrument! For instance, take the simple groundwork of his B minor (first) *Scherzo*, and then realize how greatly the charm of this piece arises from his wonderfully clever horizontal placing of it on the keyboard. How differently would Brahms, for instance, have indited the same material! A totally different language indeed! Thus:

I have  
and he  
reason  
nesses

1 con-  
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Presto con fuoco

Chopin

The sheet music consists of five staves of musical notation for piano, arranged in two systems. The first system starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 3/4 time signature. The dynamic is *fz*. The second system starts with a bass clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 2/4 time signature. The dynamic is *fz*. The notation includes various fingerings (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, P, PN, PNs) and dynamics (e.g., *fz*, *p*, *legg.*, *cresc.*). The music is labeled "Presto con fuoco" and "Chopin".



à la Brahms

MENDELSSOHN, of course, would have omitted all or most of these telling passing notes. Let us see how MENDELSSOHN might have indited the same material—but not the same mood! Thus:



à la Mendelssohn

5 2 3 1

*mf* *sf* *p* *quite fast and light*

*Ped.* *senza Ped.*

*p*

*mf* *ss*

*Ped.*

*sf*

*sf*

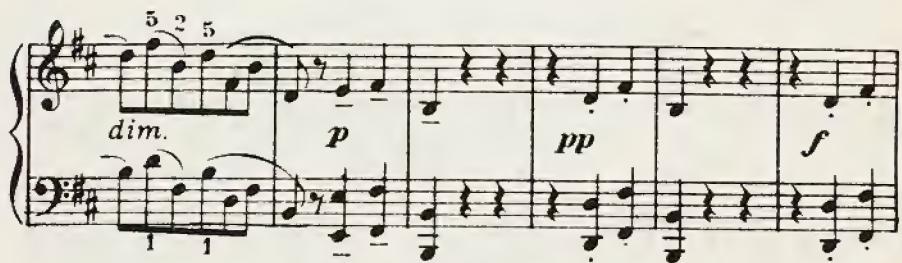
*2 3 1 2*

*sf not heavy!*

*sf*

*p*

A musical score for piano, consisting of five staves of music. The first staff is in 2/4 time, the second in 3/4, and the third in 4/4. The music includes dynamic markings like 'mf', 'sf', 'p', and 'ss', and performance instructions like 'Ped.', 'senza Ped.', and 'sf not heavy!'. Fingerings such as '5 2 3 1' and '2 3 1 2' are indicated above the staves. The music is labeled 'à la Mendelssohn' at the top right.



It is hardly to be credited nowadays that this very *effectiveness* of Chopin's, the fact of his music being so delicately and *appropriately expressed*, caused him to be misunderstood and contemned by some of the older musicians of *my* student-days, to whom Chopin's idiom was then new and strange, and was even supposed to be 'ugly'!

I remember how one of these older musicians used to speak of Chopin as '*a feeble drawing-room writer*'! I also remember how another one, at a lecture, while commanding the *E flat Nocturne*, referred to Chopin's later masterpieces (such as the fourth Ballade, etc.) as being 'puerile' harmonically—that is, harmonically childish!

Indeed, one of the foremost critics of that day publicly lamented that LEONARD BORWICK was 'wasting his time' playing so '*ephemeral*' a production as the B flat minor Sonata!

Here it is well to realize that, while it is true that mere 'effectiveness' may be the sole merit of *some* music, nevertheless it does *not* follow that a work is necessarily vulgar just because it happens to be well written for the instrument. Effectiveness, *without a Mood-message*, is always poor and, indeed, useless art; clumsiness of utterance, however, does not necessarily hide depths of feeling and thought—such as offered us by a Browning or a Brahms, in spite of their at times *uncouth language*! Indeed, fine thought, although uncouthly expressed, ever remains of greater value than mere inanities, however plausibly and expertly expressed—even when, musically, they are quite irreproachable, like Mendelssohn's music, for instance, always is! The decisive factor, in the end, always lies in the fact whether the music, or poetry, is a sincere product of *Self-expression* or not. If it is sincere, then it is *true Music*, no matter whether it is expressed so clumsily as Brahms's often is, or whether it is expressed so perfectly as Chopin's invariably is. I will at the end of the lecture read some notes on 'Effectiveness and Worthiness in Music'. But we must now pursue our main theme:

Now there has been one composer greater than any other in this respect of Colouring. He was not even really a great Master! But *his* influence on Piano-writing has perhaps been greater than that of any of the really great Masters. I allude to FRANZ LISZT; and there never has been a greater master of Piano-colour resource than he! As an illustration of

his use of Pitch-contrasts, and so many other contrasting devices, we will take as an instance his Twelfth Rhapsody, in C sharp minor. We are apt in these days to condemn such a piece as 'mere display music'—and perhaps it is already old-fashioned, i.e., dated; yet these old Hungarian folk-tunes (like all folk-tunes) are ever fresh; and as to 'vulgar display'—well, it all depends on the performer! Such a piece, it is true, can easily be made a vehicle for vulgarity, pure and simple; but if the particularly beautiful tunes this Rhapsody (and some of the others) contains are treated musically, with the spirit of reverence they so fully deserve, then Liszt's wonderful settings may yet give pleasure for many years to come. In his own playing of the Rhapsodies (when I heard him in the 'eighties) there was then no longer any trace of the showman and mere virtuoso; for under his fingers they appeared as finished artistic productions, perfect and beautiful.

I will try to give you some idea of this 12th Rhapsody—to illustrate Liszt's use of pitch contrasts and other true colouring devices. You will notice he gives some *ten distinct colourings* in the very *first two pages* alone! Thus :

(The lecturer here played the whole of No. 12 Rhapsody with the exception of a cut near the end.)

Liszt

① INTRO.  
Mesto.

*f marcato*

*L.H.*  
Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

13 6 1 2  
trem.  
*pp* *molto* *ff*

② R.H. *simile*  
*f* > > > > > *pp* *cresc. molto* *ff*

3

*ben cantabile L.H.*  
*sempre se marcato*

*Ped.*    *Ped.*    *Ped.*    *Ped.*

4    34    5

*ff*  
*grandioso*

*1 34*    *1 34*    *p 34*  
*molto*

*L.H.*    *L.H.*    *L.H.*

*lunga*

*sp*  
*rit.*

*L.H.*    *L.H.*    *L.H.*

6

*ff non troppo pesante*  
*cresc. molto*

*rit.*

9

Adagio (*ma non troppo*)

(7) *s* molto rit. *sf* allargando *s* sostenuto

pesante a) lange Paüse

(8) *Un poco più lento*  
in tempo ad lib. *sem pre cantabile*

ben cantabile *p* espress.

col Ped. Ped.

(9) *rit-accel* *pp* Ped. simile

(10)

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9 again

*dolce*

2

*tempo (vivo)*

11 *ten.*

*sostenuto*

*pesante*

12 12 12 12 1

*tr.*

*tr.*

*etc.*



## ON EFFECTIVENESS AND WORTHINESS IN MUSIC

CHOPIN was not contemned by some of the old musicians *solely* because of his effectiveness; he was also misunderstood because his music *was so new in thought and in idiom*—and, indeed, has remained so to this day. To be ‘new’ is always a crime in Musical History, because it is a young art. Every great Master in Music has had to expiate his newness. And *this*, because eventually the best of us (musicians especially) become hide-bound, and we then rage against anything and everything that does not comfortably agree with the hard-and-fast formulae with which we happen to have fettered ourselves. Let us, however, be tender towards the older musicians, let us remember that we are *all* of us fated to become immobile eventually, both in intellect and emotion. With some of us this sadness supervenes comparatively early in life, with some later on, but it is sure to happen in the natural course of existence—in that little swing of the pendulum which represents the span of our individualistic participation in the progress of the Universe.

While we are still young and nimble of mind, *everything* new, striking, and surprising excites us wildly, whatever its nature, whether good *or* bad. But gradually, insidiously, after middle age, we shall find our minds gradually stiffening like our muscles, and then, instead of the wild delight that the excitement of mere novelty used to bring to us, we shall first begin by questioning each novel sensation, and, still later, perhaps find that anything and everything unusual becomes an irksome matter; until at last we shall indignantly resent being stirred up at all—and, of course, we shall then no longer be able to valuate *any* new thought (because our own immobility of mind will no longer allow us to adjust our musical habits to the new circumstances) and thus the highest power we can attain to in life will have left us! For as HERBERT SPENCER has said, truly, *the highest and best life is the one that can with the greatest ease adjust itself to its environment.*

When the time comes that we are shutting the doors of our minds, I trust we may all have the wisdom of old SIR JOHN GOSS:

CIPRIANI POTTER (one of the former Principals of the Royal Academy of Music) had allowed himself to be converted by his pupil, ARTHUR SULLIVAN, into being an ardent 'Schumannite', and thus had proved himself to be still youthful in spite of his years; but when he, in turn, tried to convert the older man, Goss, he found himself up against a wall. But Goss had the wisdom *to know himself* and his age. Instead of rampaging against this 'new music' of Schumann's, and trying to stem the rising tide in Schumann's favour, he resignedly said to Potter, 'No, I am unable to enter into your enthusiasm, I *cannot* like this new music but—I am *not going to condemn it!* I am an old man, and maybe it is I *who am no longer able to take in the New*'. Sullivan told us this in class, and it made a vivid impression on me—which I hope I may remember when my days of Shut-doors shall have arrived. They haven't yet, I am thankful to say!\*

The moral of all this is, that we must be careful to watch our own attitude in judging the Arts. We older ones must, indeed, remember, that as the years roll on, the force of our personal bias will surely grow stronger and stronger. On the other hand, *while we are still young*, we must also be on our guard, else the attraction which *mere novelty* and excitement then exercises over us, may lead us to worship *mere* superficial qualities, and even bad and make-believe Art. For Art is *not necessarily strong and great and fine* just because it is—**SUCCESSFULLY UNUSUAL**.

A really clever technician can always use means of effect—stunts—*to create the Unusual*—provided he possess some measure of imagination. One can, indeed, turn out the '*successfully unusual*' *to order*, but we must not be misled by such *Advertisement* (or *Poster*) Music.

\* Indeed, I find that when really new and great music is presented (such as the BAX Concerto-Septet or BLOCH String Quartet, recently heard), that I am just as much moved by these true Master-pieces, as I might have been fifty years ago! Possibly more so, since the piled-up experiences enable one better to grasp what has been accomplished, modern idioms and all. Certainly, as the years roll on, one becomes more intolerant of make-believe music, but one has the compensation that the value of the older master-pieces is found to grow ever greater and greater!

Here we shall see, as I maintained a moment ago, that while thought and feeling *sincerely* expressed always deserves the name of Music—although it may happen to be ‘effective’, and although it may even happen to be new and strange—nevertheless it does not follow that it is of high value. High value depends on the nature of the thought or feeling expressed; it depends on the nobility of the emotions that have prompted the music into existence. Herein lies the power of the really great Masters of Music. Not only do they try *sincerely to express what they feel*, but over and above this, the thoughts and feelings expressed are also of *a high order of mind*. You will find that the emotions expressed by the really great Masters are not trivial relations of petty, private personal feelings—although even Beethoven and Brahms are *occasionally* found ‘whining’. No, the great Masters are great because they are so often found dealing with emotions arising from a perception of that which is (in a sense) *outside* of us. Indeed, they bring home to us the sense of *the Universe itself!*

It is particularly so with ‘the three B.’s’—*Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms*—that we so often find messages of this nature; but the other great Masters also reach this height at times. We feel *elevated*, ennobled, by an understanding and *understood* performance of *really great works*, because we feel that we have been brought *into nearer contact with the Ultimate in Nature*—the Something All-pervading outside of us, and yet part of us. The great ones teach us, and help us indeed to the highest perception of which we are capable, but which perception, nevertheless, is so often obscured for us by those specially professing (but failing) to teach it, through the eidolons, dogmas and formulas of the Churches!

However, the days of this kind of Obscuration are now happily past!

### CODA

I think what I have said and shown you has made clear the important distinction between mere Inflection and the broad effects of *True Colouring*. Keep these distinctions in view whenever you are teaching, practising or playing, and it will better all your work!

But always remember, here as everywhere else, that all rules of expression—all those rules and laws which I have

tried to make plain—are but a MEANS to an end, and that such means must never be applied for their own sake, or for your sake, or others' sake, but must only be applied to make clearer the Mood, the Music-sense of Shape and Emotion, and the sense of the Beautiful—expressed through Rhythmical Shape.

In short, never *try to do*, but always *try to SEE!*

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\* When Mr. Tobias Matthay first published his work, *The Act of Touch*, in 1903, it was received with very mixed feelings by the musical profession. Many scoffed at the mere fact that an acknowledged expert required some 300 pages of closely printed matter to explain how to play the pianoforte; others regarded the book as "a one-man's fad" which would have its day and be gone; others indignantly denied that anything could be wrong with existing methods, which had produced a Liszt, a Rubinstein, a Madame Schumann. But the wise, even if unable to grasp a tithe of the new gospel at first, recognized the fact that here was something giving food for thought and experiment.

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